

Herto

**Annual Report**  
OF THE  
**MEDICAL OFFICER**  
OF HEALTH  
TO THE  
HARPENDEN  
**Urban District Council**  
FOR THE YEAR 1914



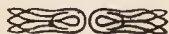
**Census Figures in 1911:**

AREA IN ACRES, 1631.


POPULATION, 6173.

NUMBER OF INHABITED HOUSES, 1401.

AVERAGE NUMBER PER HOUSE, 4·4.



HARPENDEN:  
FISHER, KNIGHT & CO., PRINTERS,  
HEATH PRESS.



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2018 with funding from  
Wellcome Library

<https://archive.org/details/b29709568>

# REPORT, 1914

---

GENTLEMEN,

I estimate the population of Harpenden at the middle of last year at 6,700.

Of the 44 deaths registered, three were of non-residents. To the remaining 41 have to be added 13 deaths of residents notified to me through the County Council. The actual number of deaths was therefore 54 and the corresponding corrected death rate 8 per thousand. For England and Wales it was 12·9.

Six of these deaths were of children under one year, and three of these were due to congenital causes. There were 21 deaths of persons of 65 years and upwards. There were no deaths from Zymotic Diseases for the first time since I have been your Medical Officer. There were ten deaths from Cancer or malignant disease.

102 births were registered—56 of males and 46 of females. Three were illegitimate. The birthrate was 15·2 per thousand, lower even than last year. The mortality of infants measured by the proportion of deaths under one year of age to registered births was 58 per thousand.

## **Notification of Infectious Disease.**

Thirty-four notifications were received. These consisted of 12 of Tuberculosis (nine being Pulmonary), 17 of Scarlet Fever, one of Diphtheria, two of Enteric Fever, and two of Erysipelas.

Four cases of Phthisis have died during the year. One case of Enteric Fever occurred amongst the troops and was interesting from the fact that the patient had been twice inoculated against Typhoid: once during the original disease and again at the beginning of the relapse when he was brought to hospital and the condition discovered. The other case of Enteric Fever was nursed at home. Of the 17 cases of Scarlet

Fever, four occurred amongst the Territorials and some of the civilian cases were undoubtedly due to this source. There were amongst the military a number of cases of Tonsillitis some of which were, in my opinion, of a Scarlatinal nature. The condition is difficult to diagnose, the rash in adults being often very evanescent, and only a little peeling of the hands and feet—or the occurrence of a case of Scarlet Fever in a child in the house being left to point to the Scarlatinal nature of the Tonsillitis. The Medical Officers of the different battalions gave me every assistance and very readily fell in with all my suggestions.

### **Hospital Accommodation.**

The Smallpox Hospital on the Cherry Trees Farm estate has not yet been occupied. But with the incursion of such numbers of troops and the occurrence of sporadic cases of the disease in the country, our immunity from attack may not be prolonged.

We have absolutely no accommodation for Enteric Fever. If a case can be nursed at home so much the better; but if not and if there should be a number of cases, the only plan that occurs to me is to get hold of an unoccupied house and turn it into a temporary Hospital. I believe the original idea was that the new wards at the Sister's Hospital were to be used alternately for Enteric Fever or Diphtheria, but as a matter of fact they have been occupied entirely with Diphtheric cases, and are, I understand from the Medical Officer, not available for Enteric Fever.

### **Co-operation with the Military Authorities.**

As you know, after the mobilisation in August, we had quartered upon us four battalions of the Notts & Derby Regiment (the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th Sherwood Foresters) who with the R.A.M.C. numbered about 4,500 men. This sudden increase of the normal population, from 6,700 to 11,200, more than doubling the number of adults, put at first a somewhat severe strain on the local sanitary resources. I had a number of interviews with the Senior Military Officers and with the Medical Officers with reference to the supervision of billets, scavenging, the precautions to be taken to prevent the occurrence and spread of infectious disease, and generally the steps



to be taken to maintain the health of both civil and military population.

For billeting purposes all the empty houses, 23 in number, were taken, and were occupied by a number of men varying from 30 to over 100. In occupied houses one room on the ground floor was usually selected, preferably with an external door to facilitate access to outside sanitary arrangements. Three or four men were billeted in a cottage and from six to twelve in the larger rooms in the residential districts. Overcrowding was not unusual and I made representations on many occasions to the military authorities, as it was my duty to do, but without much success. The trouble arose from an exaggerated estimate of the capacity of Harpenden for billeting purposes. When the men arrived they had to be put somewhere; and after all we are at war and cannot grumble at military exigencies. When the Notts & Derby battalions left after twelve weeks' stay, I had hoped that the War Office Circular of October 10th, 1914, directing Commanding Officers to communicate in future with, and consult the local Medical Officer of Health before billeting, might enable me to give some suggestion of the number of men who might be satisfactorily billeted here, but no notice has been taken of this requirement of the War Office up to the date of this report.

The Sanitary Inspector was instructed to inspect the billets, examine sanitary appliances, and take such steps as were necessary to prevent and abate nuisances. These latter mainly arose from stopped drains—especially in empty houses; from overflowing cesspools; deposits of refuse; and food left lying about in billets.

The Inspector was also authorised to provide more horses and carts for the extra scavenging required. The contractor was furnished with a list of billeted houses where there were closet-pails, and of places where temporary latrines had been provided. They were emptied and disinfected early each morning. Dustbins were emptied at least once a week in every case; twice a week where there were eight men; and daily where there were 20 or more.

The Water Supply was ample and the Disposal Works were able to deal easily with the extra amount of sewage delivered.

I had for some time grave anxiety about the possible incidence of disease through flies in such a hot summer from

accumulations of refuse. That this was prevented was due to good scavenging; the vigilance of the sanitary police, and of the occupiers of houses who are quite up-to-date in their knowledge in this respect; and to good fortune.

Dr. Farrar, the Local Government Board Medical Inspector visited Harpenden, but found little to complain about.

I can safely say that the health of the troops was not deleteriously affected by the sanitary condition of the district.

I have caused to be printed a circular, copies of which are supplied to the Officers of troops billeted here, giving information about the district generally, a list of premises undesirable for billeting purposes, the procedure to be taken in the event of nuisances arising or of infectious disease breaking out, the General and Infectious Hospitals in the neighbourhood; and also containing certain suggestions of sanitary value.

## **Water Supply.**

The Harpenden Water Company's from the mains, has been analysed by Professor Kenwood and pronounced as usual satisfactory. A similar report was given on a sample of well-water, the situation of which suggested possible contamination.

The new Sewerage scheme is responsible largely for a rapid increase in the amount of water used. In 1913, 36,608,727 gallons of water were supplied while last year the figure rose to 50,350,000 gallons.

May I again ask that occupiers of houses should see that the storage cistern in the roof is cleaned at least once a year; also that they should ascertain and label taps connected directly with the main and see that water for drinking and cooking purposes is drawn from such taps only.

## **Drainage and Sewage.**

During the year under review the Lea Valley Sewerage Scheme with its pumping machinery for raising the sewerage to the level of the main outfall station, has been completed. The first house connections to the sewer were made in April, and to the end of the year 30 premises were joined on. In the Harpenden Valley 400 premises have been linked up as compared with 468 in 1913, making a total of 898 altogether.



The volume of sewage treated in January was 2,126,000 gallons, and in December 3,575,500 gallons. The total quantity during the year was 37,662,000 gallons. The average daily flow at the present time is about 120,000 gallons. This does not include all the storm-water discharged at the works. When the flow through the outfall sewer exceeds three times the dry weather flow, the excess is automatically diverted into storm-water tanks, from which it is delivered into the effluent after undergoing filtration only.

In my report last year I described in some detail the various stages of sewage treatment. I then ventured to point out what appeared to me to be defects in the system which I believe should and could be remedied.

These were (1) the septic action set up in the detritus chambers ; (2) the method of delivering the sewage at the bottom of the slate beds instead of on the top ; and (3) the large amount of sludge which had to be dealt with by manual labour.

On visiting the works I found these matters have not been remedied. Nearly 1000 loads of sludge were removed from the screening chamber, the detritus chamber, and the sludge beds. In my opinion this sludge would be much reduced in bulk, fouling of the channels and filter beds would be prevented and incidentally manual labour lessened, if the sewage was not allowed to stagnate in the detritus chamber and was delivered on the slate beds in a fresh and not a septic condition ; on the top as designed by the inventor, and not at the bottom as at present, for reasons which nobody can explain. I understand that the matter is still under the consideration of the Drainage Committee.

The number of cesspools emptied is rapidly decreasing as the drains are connected with the sewer. 350 cesspools have been abolished since May 1913, when the first connection was made. During the year 65,700 gallons of sewage have been removed from 65 cesspools, compared with 222,400 gallons from 222 in 1913.

On the receipt of a first application for emptying a cesspool now, an intimation is sent by the Inspector that only one emptying will be made by the cesspool apparatus except for the purpose of connecting the drains with the public sewer. This has had a good effect in speeding up the work of connecting house drains with the sewer and abolishing cesspools.

## Scavenging.

The same contractor carries out this work under the supervision of the Sanitary Inspector.

The whole of the district is now attended to except a few houses on the outskirts which are rural in character and where there is no difficulty about the disposal of refuse on adjoining land.

Dustbins are emptied once a week, and closet pails twice. Trade refuse from shops is removed on a small payment by arrangement with the contractor. House refuse is dumped on on the Council's disused gravel pit ; paper and litter are burnt ; and when the level is sufficiently high a covering of earth and road trimmings is superimposed. The contents of closet pails are deposited on the contractor's field and ploughed into the ground.

## Housing of the Working Classes.

250 cottages have been inspected under the Housing and Town Planning Act. None were found to be structurally so defective as to warrant their being condemned and closed. Some from old age are approaching that condition.

Our sewerage system has done much to improve the sanitary condition of such cottages. The abolition of cesspools and old privies, the conversion of pail closets into water closets, the provision of proper sinks and gullies for slop-water previously splashed out at the back doors, have all been rendered possible by main drainage.

Other improvements consisted of repairs to roofs, guttering, and spouting, the provision of portable dustbins to replace old and defective brick refuse pits, paving brick yards, cleansing and white washing rooms, and in three cases the removal of pigs kept too close to houses.

Four old cottages condemned in 1912 have been practically rebuilt and provided with new sanitary appliances and drains. Two of the closing orders were determined last year, and two early this year. The rents have been correspondingly raised.



## Summary of Sanitary Work.

Houses inspected in routine ... ..	264
„ „ on complaint ... ..	47
„ „ after infectious disease ... ..	28
Visits to schools ... ..	6
Inspections of Bakehouses ... ..	12
„ „ Laundries ... ..	8
„ „ Slaughterhouses ... ..	11
„ „ Cowsheds ... ..	12
„ „ Factories and Workshops ... ..	40
Privies abolished ... ..	2
Pail closets converted to water closets ... ..	41
New drains constructed ... ..	257
Repaired and unstopped ... ..	39
Cesspools emptied ... ..	65
Premises connected to sewers ... ..	400
Yards paved ... ..	13
New dustbins provided ... ..	31
Premises disinfected ... ..	28
Cases of overcrowding abated ... ..	4
Premises repaired—roofs, ceilings, walls, etc. ... ..	38
Nuisances from dampness abated ... ..	17
Premises cleansed and whitewashed ... ..	40
Nuisances from animals (pigs) abated ... ..	3
Condemnation order determined ... ..	2
Samples of water taken for analysis ... ..	2
Offensive accumulations removed after notice ... ..	19
Premises condemned ... ..	0

## Factories and Workshops.

These have been inspected and the provisions of the act insisted upon.

The principle Sanitary improvement this year was the abolition of cesspools, the reconstruction of drains and their connection to the sewer.

In two cases where women are employed, the Home Office Inspector intimated that water closets should be provided. The Sanitary Inspector saw that this was done.

There are 48 premises on the register. There are no offensive trades in the district.

## **Adoptive Acts and Byelaws.**

The Infectious Diseases (Prevention) Act 1890 and the Public Health Acts (Amendment Act) 1890, Part III, are both in force in this district.

The majority of the Adoptive Parts of the Public Health Acts (Amendment Act) 1907 are now in force.

The following byelaws have been adopted, confirmed by the Local Government Board, and are in force: New Streets and Buildings, Drainage of Existing Buildings, Prevention of Nuisances, Slaughter Houses, Means of Escape in Case of Fire, Houses Let in Lodgings, Common Lodging Houses, Tents, Vans, Sheds, etc., Offensive Trades, Regulations with respect to Dairies, Cowsheds and Milkshops.

I have to thank the Sanitary Inspector, Mr. J. H. Leverton, for his advice and assistance.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

HUGH FRASER, M.A., M.B., C.M.

*March 27th, 1915.*





